

NEWS from the T&I DEMOCRATS

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Democratic Caucus

U.S. House of Representatives, 2163 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

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For Immediate Release, Friday, August 11, 2006

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OBERSTAR REACTS TO BP ALASKA PIPELINE PROBLEMS

WASHINGTON – Congressman James L. Oberstar (D-MN), the Ranking Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, issued the following statement regarding the BP pipeline problems in Alaska.

“I am pleased that the Department of Transportation has taken immediate action to address the situation in Alaska and outline the criteria BP must meet before it can restart its downed line. However, this accident and the shutdown of BP’s operations could have been prevented had the Bush Administration taken the necessary steps to regulate low-stress lines, require oil companies to conduct rigorous inspections of those lines at regular intervals, and make immediate repairs when anomalies are found.

For over 20 years, I have been working diligently on pipeline safety issues. Following the March 2nd oil spill on the North Slope of Alaska, I cautioned the Administration and this Congress that accidents were increasing, corrosion remained the leading cause of hazardous liquid pipeline accidents, and it was our duty to strengthen pipeline safety and prevent future spills.

Instead, on June 6, 2006, three months after the initial BP spill, the Bush Administration sent a bill to Congress that would weaken the regulation, inspection, and enforcement of hazardous liquid and gas pipelines. The bill fails to address low-stress and gas distribution pipelines and eliminates the requirement under current law for gas pipeline operators to re-inspect and repair their pipelines at least once every seven years. The legislation also waives important environmental and safety regulations, and it re-directs funds currently used for training fire fighters and conducting pipeline safety program enforcement to big oil and gas companies to pay for the restoration of pipelines. In addition, at the end of June, the Administration increased the length of time hazardous liquid pipeline operators have under current regulations to re-inspect and repair their pipelines from 60 to 68 months.

This incident serves as a sobering example of why we need a stronger pipeline safety, inspection, and enforcement regime. Now consumers are left paying the price at the pump for the failure of the Bush Administration to strengthen pipeline safety before it was too late. It is Congress’ duty to act as a watchdog on the behalf of the American public. If the Administration is not upholding its responsibility to protect consumers, Congress must take decisive action to enact stricter requirements. At the earliest opportunity, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee should hold a thorough oversight hearing on the BP pipeline failure to determine what should have been done to prevent this catastrophe and what laws and regulations need to be strengthened to ensure the safety of our nation’s hazardous liquid and gas pipelines in the future.”

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